

# Moldovan language

**Moldovan** (dated **Moldavian**; *limba moldovenească*, or лимба молдовеняскэ in Moldovan Cyrillic) is one of the two names of the Romanian language in the Republic of Moldova,<sup>[4][5]</sup> prescribed by Article 13 of the current constitution;<sup>[6]</sup> the other name, recognized by the Declaration of Independence of Moldova and the Constitutional Court of Moldova, is "Romanian".

At the official level, the Constitutional Court interpreted in 2013 that Article 13 of the current constitution is superseded by the Declaration of Independence,<sup>[7]</sup> thus giving official status to the language name "Romanian".<sup>[8][9]</sup>

The language of the Moldovans has been historically identified by both terms. However, during the time of the Soviet Union, Moldovan, or as it was called at the time, "Moldavian", was the only term officially recognized when Moldova was known as the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Soviet policy emphasized distinctions between "Moldavians" and Romanians due to their different histories. Its resolution declared Moldavian a distinct Romance language independent of Romanian. Since the reintroduction of the Latin script in 1989,<sup>[10]</sup> the 1991 Declaration of Independence of Moldova identified the official language as "Romanian", while the 1994 Constitution used the term "Moldovan".

The status of the official language was further legislated in the early 2000s. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted a law defining "Moldovan" and "Romanian" as *designations* for the same language (*glottonyms*).<sup>[11]</sup> In 2013, the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that the name "Romanian", as used in the Declaration of Independence to identify the official language, prevails over the name "Moldovan", given in Article 13 of the Constitution.<sup>[7]</sup>

The breakaway region of Transnistria continues to recognize "Moldovan" as one of its official languages, along with Russian and Ukrainian.<sup>[12]</sup>

In the general population, while a majority of the inhabitants in the capital city of Chişinău<sup>[13]</sup> and, according to surveys, people with higher education<sup>[14]</sup> call their language "Romanian", most rural residents indicated "Moldovan" as their native language in the last census.<sup>[13]</sup>

Moldovan	
limba moldovenească (in Latin alphabet) <div>лимба молдовеняскэ (in modern Cyrillic alphabet) лимба Молдовенѣскъ (in old Cyrillic)</div>	
Pronunciation	<span>[limba moldovenˈjaskə]</span>
Native to	Moldova
Ethnicity	Moldovans
Language family	<div>Indo-European<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Italic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Romance<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eastern Romance<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Balkan Romance<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Romanian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Moldovan</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Writing system	Latin (Moldova) <div>Cyrillic (Transnistria)</div>
Official status	
Official language in	<span><span></span></span> Moldova <div><span><span></span></span> <i>Transnistria</i></div>
Recognised minority language in	<span><span></span></span> Ukraine
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	mo ( <span>https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/lang_codes_name.php?iso_639_1=</span> ) (retired)
ISO 639-2	mol ( <span>https://www.loc.gov/standard/s/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=</span> ) (retired)
ISO 639-3	mol (retired)

The variety of Romanian spoken in Moldova is the Moldavian subdialect, which is also spoken in northeastern Romania. The two countries share the same literary standard.<sup>[15][16]</sup>

The word "Moldavian" is also used to refer collectively to the north-eastern varieties of spoken Romanian, spread approximately within the territory of the former Principality of Moldavia (now split between Moldova, Romania and Ukraine). The Moldavian variety is considered one of the five major spoken varieties of Romanian. All five are written identically. There is no particular linguistic break at the Prut River, the border between Romania and Moldova.

In schools in Moldova, the term "Romanian language" has been used since independence. In 2007, Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin asked for the term to be changed to "Moldovan language", but due to public pressure against that choice, the term was not changed.<sup>[17]</sup>

The standard alphabet is equivalent to the Romanian alphabet (based on the Latin alphabet). Until 1918, varieties of the Romanian Cyrillic alphabet were used. The Moldovan Cyrillic alphabet (derived from the Russian alphabet and standardised in the Soviet Union) was used in 1924–1932 and 1938–89, and remains in use in Transnistria.<sup>[18]</sup>

<b>Glottolog</b>	mold1248 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mold1248">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mold1248</a> ) Moldavian <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>IETF</b>	ro-MD <sup>[2][3]</sup>

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## History and politics

The history of the Moldovan language refers to the historical evolution of the glottonym *Moldavian*/*Moldovan* in Moldova and beyond. It is closely tied to the region's political status, as during long periods of rule by Russia and the Soviet Union, officials emphasized the language's name as part of separating the Moldovans from those people who began to identify as Romanian in a different nation-building process. Cyrillic script was in use. From a linguistic perspective, "Moldovan" is an alternative name for the varieties of the Romanian language spoken in the Republic of Moldova (see History of the

Romanian language).

Before 1918, during the period between the wars, and after the union of Bessarabia with Romania, scholars did not have consensus that Moldovans and the Romanians formed a single ethnic group.<sup>[19]</sup> The Moldovan peasants had grown up in a different political entity and missed the years of creating a pan-Romanian national political consciousness. They identified as Moldovans speaking the language "Moldovan." This caused reactions from pan-Romanian nationalists.<sup>[20]</sup> The concept of the distinction of Moldovan from Romanian was explicitly stated only in the early 20th century. It accompanied the raising of national awareness among Moldovans, with the Soviets emphasizing distinctions between Moldavians and Romanians.<sup>[21]</sup>

Major developments since the fall of the Soviet Union include resuming use of a Latin script rather than Cyrillic letters in 1989, and several changes in the statutory name of the official language used in Moldova. At one point of particular confusion about identity in the 1990s, all references to geography in the name of the language were dropped, and it was officially known simply as *limba de stat* — "the state language".

Moldovan was assigned the code *mo* in ISO 639-1 and code *mol* in ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3.<sup>[22]</sup> Since November 2008, these have been deprecated, leaving *ro* and *ron* (639-2/T) and *rum* (639-2/B), the language identifiers as of 2013 to be used for the variant of the Romanian language also known as Moldavian and Moldovan in English, the ISO 639-2 Registration Authority said in explaining the decision.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

## Reversion to Latin script, and beyond

In 1989 the contemporary Romanian version of the Latin alphabet was adopted as the official script of the Moldavian SSR.

The Declaration of Independence<sup>[25]</sup> of Moldova (27 August 1991) named the official language as "Romanian." The 1994 constitution, passed under a Communist government, declared "Moldovan" as the state language.

When in 1992 the Romanian Academy changed the official orthography of the Romanian language, the Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova did not initially make these changes, which however have since been adopted.

In 1996 the Moldovan president Mircea Snegur attempted to change the official name of the language back to "Romanian"; the Moldovan Parliament, Communist-dominated, dismissed the proposal as promoting "Romanian expansionism."

In 2003, a Moldovan–Romanian dictionary (*Dicționar Moldovenesc–Românesc* (2003)) by Vasile Stati was published aiming to prove that there existed two distinct languages. Reacting to this, linguists of the Romanian Academy in Romania declared that all the Moldovan words are also Romanian words, although some of its contents are disputed as being Russian loanwords. In Moldova, the head of the Academy of



1999 Moldovan stamp celebrating 10 years since reverting to the Latin script

### VIETILE SFÎNȚILOR

IN  
LIMBA MOLDOVENEASCĂ,  
Introduse pe teritoriul cărților „Viețile Sfinților”  
de  
Sf. DIMITRIE AL ROSTOVULUI,  
tipărite în tipografia Sinodală din Moscova cu complicități, însemnări  
ilustrative și cu chipurile sfintilor.  
LUNA MAI (5—15)  
CARTEA ÎNȚIAIA.  
Editia Secției culturale a Comitetului episcopiei din Chișinău.  
A apărut din îndrăzneală și cu venirea L. P. S. S. (1926) în tipografia „Căminul” din Chișinău.  
1926.

Book in Moldovan language published in interwar Romania

Sciences' Institute of Linguistics, Ion Bărbuță, described the dictionary as "an absurdity, serving political purposes". Stati, however, accused both of promoting "Romanian colonialism". At that point, a group of Romanian linguists adopted a resolution stating that promotion of the notion of a distinct Moldovan language is an anti-scientific campaign.<sup>[26]</sup>

In the 2004 census, 16.5% (558,508) of the 3,383,332 people living in Moldova declared Romanian as their native language, whereas 60% declared Moldovan. Most of the latter responses were from rural populations. While the majority of the population in the capital city of Chișinău gave their language as "Romanian", in the countryside more than six-sevenths of the Romanian/Moldovan speakers indicated "Moldovan" as their native language, reflecting historic conservatism.<sup>[27]</sup>

In December 2013, the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that the Declaration of Independence takes precedence over the Constitution, and that the state language should be called Romanian.<sup>[28]</sup>

As of March 2017, the presidential website under Igor Dodon has seen the Romanian language option changed to "Moldovan", which is described to be "in accordance with the constitution" by said president.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Controversy

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The matter of whether or not "Moldovan" is a separate language continues to be contested politically within and beyond the Republic of Moldova. The 1989 Language Law of the Moldavian SSR, which is still in effect in Moldova, according to the Constitution,<sup>[30]</sup> asserts a "linguistic Moldo-Romanian identity".<sup>[10]</sup> Article 13 of the Moldovan Constitution names it "the national language of the country" (the original uses the phrase *limba de stat*, which literally means *the language of the state*).

In the breakaway region of Transnistria, Moldovan is declared an official language, together with Ukrainian and Russian.

Standard "Moldovan" is widely considered to be identical to the standard Romanian.<sup>[31]</sup> Writing about "essential differences", Vasile Stati, supporter of Moldovenism, is obliged to concentrate almost exclusively on lexical rather than grammatical differences. Whatever language distinctions may once have existed, these have been decreasing rather than increasing. King wrote in 2000 that "in the main, Moldovan in its standard form was more Romanian by the 1980s than at any point in its history".<sup>[32]</sup>

In 2002, the Moldovan Minister of Justice Ion Morei said that Romanian and Moldovan were the same language and that the Constitution of Moldova should be amended to reflect this—not by substituting "Romanian" for the word "Moldovan", but by adding that "Romanian and Moldovan are the same language".<sup>[33]</sup> The education minister Valentin Beniuc said: "I have stated more than once that the notion of a Moldovan language and a Romanian language reflects the same linguistic phenomenon in essence."<sup>[34]</sup> The President of Moldova Vladimir Voronin acknowledged that the two languages are identical, but said that Moldovans should have the right to call their language "Moldovan".<sup>[35]</sup>

In the 2004 census, of the 3.38 million people living in Moldova, 60% identified Moldovan as their native language; 16.5% chose Romanian. While 37% of all urban Romanian/Moldovan speakers identified Romanian as their native language, in the countryside 86% of the Romanian/Moldovan speakers indicated Moldovan, a historic holdover.<sup>[27]</sup> Independent studies found a Moldovan linguistic identity asserted in



Demonstration in Chișinău, January 2002. The text on the inscription is "Romanian people —Romanian language".

particular by the rural population and post-Soviet political class.<sup>[36]</sup> In a survey conducted in four villages near the border with Romania, when asked about their native language the interviewees identified the following: Moldovan 53%, Romanian 44%, Russian 3%.<sup>[37]</sup>

When reporting on EU Council deliberations regarding an agreement between the European Community and Moldova, the Romanian reporter Jean Marin Marinescu included a recommendation to avoid formal references to the 'Moldovan language.'<sup>[38]</sup> The Romanian press speculated that the EU banned the usage of the phrase "Moldovan language".<sup>[39]</sup> However, the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, denied these allegations. She said that the Moldovan language is referred to in the 1998 Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Moldova, and hence it is considered a part of the acquis, binding to all member states.<sup>[40]</sup>

## Orthography

The language was generally written in a Romanian Cyrillic alphabet (based on the Old Church Slavonic alphabet) before the 19th century. Both Old Cyrillic and Latin were used until World War I, at which point the Old Cyrillic alphabet fell out of use. In the interwar period, Soviet authorities in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic alternately used Latin or Cyrillic for writing the language, mirroring the political goals of the moment. Between 1940 and 1989, i.e., during Soviet rule, the new Moldovan Cyrillic alphabet replaced Latin as the official alphabet in Moldova (then Moldavian SSR).<sup>[41]</sup> In 1989, the Latin script was once again adopted in Moldova by Law 3462 of 31 August 1989, which provided rules for transliterating Cyrillic to Latin, along with the orthographic rules used in Romania at the time. Transnistria, however, still uses the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>[12]</sup>

Though not immediately adopting these, the Academy of Sciences of Moldova acknowledged both the Romanian Academy's decision of 1993 and the orthographic reform of 2005.<sup>[42]</sup> In 2000, the Moldovan Academy recommended adopting the spelling rules used in Romania,<sup>[43]</sup> and in 2010 launched a schedule for the transition to the new rules that was completed in 2011 (regarding publications).<sup>[44]</sup> However, these changes were not implemented by Moldova's Ministry of Education, so the old orthographic conventions were maintained in the education sector such as in school textbooks.

On 17 October 2016, Minister of Education Corina Fusu signed Order No. 872 on the application of the revised spelling rules as adopted by the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, coming into force on the day of signing.<sup>[45]</sup> Since then the spelling used by institutions subordinated to the Ministry of Education is in line with the spelling norms used in Romania since 1993. This order, however, has no application to other government institutions, nor has Law 3462 been amended to reflect these changes; thus, those institutions continue to use the old spelling.

The choice of alphabet is a factor in calling the language "Moldovan" or "Romanian", with the Cyrillic alphabet associated with the term "Moldovan" and Latin alphabet with "Romanian", which somewhat parallels the usage of "Serbian" in the former Yugoslavia to refer to the standard Serbo-Croatian language written in Cyrillic. This is especially since Moldova has been slowly adopting Romanian spelling reforms and conventions with its Latin script, and Transnistria continues to use the Cyrillic alphabet and call the language "Moldovan".



**Left.** A Limba noastră social ad in Chişinău, to which the handwritten word "Română" was added.

**Right.** The inscription on the building in Chişinău: "I am Moldovan! I speak Moldovan!"



A "Welcome!" sign in Moldovan Cyrillic in Tiraspol, Transnistria, 2012. The phrase in Latin alphabet would be: "Bine ați venit!"

# Phonology

## Consonants

Moldovan consonant phonemes

		<u>Labial</u>		<u>Alveolar</u>		<u>Palato-Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	
		hard	soft	hard	soft			hard	soft
<u>Nasal</u>		<u>m</u> ⟨м⟩	<u>m</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-мь⟩	<u>n</u> ⟨н⟩	<u>n</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-нь⟩		<u>ɲ</u> ⟨ɲ(u,e,a)⟩		
<u>Plosive</u>	<u>unvoiced</u>	<u>p</u> ⟨п⟩	<u>p</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-пъ⟩	<u>t</u> ⟨т⟩	<u>t</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-тъ⟩		<u>c</u> ⟨c(u,e,a)⟩	<u>k</u> ⟨к⟩	<u>k</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-къ⟩
	<u>voiced</u>	<u>b</u> ⟨б⟩	<u>b</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-бъ⟩	<u>d</u> ⟨д⟩	<u>d</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-дъ⟩		<u>ɟ</u> ⟨ɟ(u,e,a)⟩	<u>g</u> ⟨г⟩	<u>g</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-гъ⟩
<u>Affricate</u>	<u>unvoiced</u>			<u>ts</u> ⟨ц⟩	<u>ts</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-цъ⟩	<u>tʃ</u> ⟨ч⟩			
	<u>voiced</u>			<u>dʒ</u> ⟨дж⟩		<u>ʒ</u> ⟨ʒ,ж⟩			
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>voiced</u>	<u>v</u> ⟨в⟩	<u>v</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-въ⟩	<u>z</u> ⟨з⟩	<u>z</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-зь⟩		<u>j</u> ⟨j(u,e,a)⟩		
	<u>unvoiced</u>	<u>f</u> ⟨ф⟩	<u>f</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-фъ⟩	<u>s</u> ⟨с⟩	<u>s</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-съ⟩	<u>ʃ</u> ⟨ш⟩	<u>ʃ</u> ⟨ʃ(u,e,a)⟩	<u>x</u> ⟨х⟩	<u>x</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-хъ⟩
<u>Approximant</u>		<u>w</u> ⟨ŷ,y⟩		<u>r</u> ⟨р⟩	<u>r</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-ръ⟩		<u>j</u> ⟨й,и⟩		
				<u>l</u> ⟨л⟩	<u>l</u> <sup>j</sup> ⟨-лъ⟩				

## Vowels

Moldovan vowel phonemes

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>Close</u>	<u>i</u> ⟨и⟩	<u>ɨ</u> ⟨ы,-э⟩	<u>u</u> ⟨у⟩
<u>Mid</u>	<u>e</u> ⟨е⟩	<u>ə</u> ⟨э⟩	<u>o</u> ⟨о⟩
<u>Open</u>	<u>a</u> ⟨а⟩		

## Distinguishing features

## Phonotactics

Syllable structure:

## See also



- Eastern Romance substratum
- Legacy of the Roman Empire
- Origin of the Romanians
- Moldovenism
- Moldovan–Romanian dictionary
- Moldova–Romania relations
- Romanian language
- Romance languages
- Thraco-Roman
- The Balkan language area
- Varieties of the Romanian language

## Notes

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## External links

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